DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 982 EA 017 399

AUTHOR Flood, Dudley E.
TITLE Are We Victims of Our Own Success?
PUB DATE Oct 83
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New Jersey School Board Association (Atlantic City, NJ, October 26-28, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *Public Education; *Public Opinion; *Public Schools; School Districts; *Success; Unskilled Workers

ABSTRACT

In the South, the concept of exclusive education remained functional well into the 1960's. Only the most capable and the most supported children survived the system. Then the nation's priorities changed, with the result that, for the first time in history, literally everybody goes to school. Compared with other public-serving institutions, education receives a disproportionate amount of criticism. In serving all children and in having a greater percentage of the population functionally literate than has ever been so in the nation's history, schools are now expected to make every child successful. The fact is, however, that schools can only prepare students for success. The rest is in the hand of the individual. Other public institutions must contribute their reasonable share to the nurturing of the individual toward success. (MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED251982

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Dudley E. Flood
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ARE WE VICTIMS OF OUR OWN SUCCESS?

BY

Dudley E. Flood
Associate State Superintendent
North Carolina Department
of
Public Instruction

NJSBA
Atlantic City
October 26-28,
1983

EA 017 399

ARE WE VICTIMS OF OUR OWN SUCCESS?

At every available opportunity, I take pride in expressing my eternal gratitude for free public education. This is not to devalue private or parochial schools, but my pointed reference to free public education is in recognization of the fact that no other kind would have been available to me during my formative years.

The above statement is not intended to project the overworked "poor kid from across the tracks" image. Quite to the contrary, I was fully adult before it ever occurred to me that we were poor; this in spite of the fact that I was a black kid from rural eastern North Carolina, from a family of nine children, and who by the age of six years old had worn out about three thick plates from sopping homemade molasses. The prospect of being unsuccessful never entered my mind, primarily due to having access to a loving family and to free public education.

Having committed myself as an adult to furthering the concept of free public education by any means available to me, I have taught at every grade level, first through twelfth, in the public schools and have lectured at the undergraduate and graduate levels in several colleges and universities over the last 26 years. I have traveled over nearly this entire country gaining first-hand exposure to educational programs and practices. From these experiences, I have formed the following beliefs: (A) That the success which the educational community has achieved is grossly understated, underrated and underappreciated by beneficiaries of this success; and (B) that schools continue to have a tarnished image mainly because we educators are victims of our own success.

Since the success of an institution such as public education is relative to its progress toward its defined goals, one must begin with the realization

that the goal of public education is and always has been that of responding to the needs of the greater society. In doing so, for more than 100 years, education in this country remained the right and privilege of a select few persons whom fate had selected to lead the rest of us. The concept of exclusive education so permeated our society that it remained functional and viable in most of America and particularly the South at least through the 1950's and well into the 1960's. Subtle though it was, its impact on children was certain; only the most capable and the most supported children survived the system.

Even in those schools where caring teachers worked diligently with those children who presented themselves for instruction, schooling for the masses remained an American ideal which was unrealized. Compulsory attendance laws were not seriously enforced. Black and white children of poor parents in the South were kept out of school to do farm labor. Children of unskilled laborers frequently were kept at home either to help their parents or for the purpose of relieving the parents of the obligation of feeding and dressing the child for school before going to work. This process contributed to an attitude of accepting a permanent underclass of people who would perform the unpopular tasks within the work force. Over a period of time, members of this group were socialized to accept their station in life and to pass their heritage on to their children.

The pattern of exclusion and socialization of an underclass was particularly pronounced in the South because the agrarian society was dependent upon a source of cheap labor for its existence. The most predictable supply of cheap labor is that of a permanent underclass of uneducated people.

In the early 60's, the nation's priorities changed abruptly when we were introduced to the space age, an era which would dictate that the nation's

best interest would be served by an educated population. The nation then turned to its schools and proposed that we generate the solutions to problems which had developed over the years of exclusion. The method for remediating the problem was obvious; that schools must become inclusive; that every child must be afforded equal educational opportunity and that the nation through its central government would stimulate and monitor activity in that direction. Again, the educational community arose to the challenge.

Today, twenty years after the nation proclaimed that education would be inclusive, we find that for the first time in the history of human kind, literally everybody goes to school: the rich and the poor; the native born and the alien; the English speaking and the non-English speaking; whites, browns, reds, yellows, and blacks; the highly motivated and the reticent learner; the exceptionally talented and the mentally retarded; the robust and the infirm, all go to school. Children from "good" homes, "bad" homes, foster homes, no homes all go to school. Children with loving parents, abusive parents, estranged parents, divorced parents, no parents, all go to school. That is as it should be. Yet, the irony is that the "public" still believes that if you take all these children in September and give them equal financial resources, equal teaching and "BASIC" education as we did in the old days, they should all reach June with the same set of competencies. This belief leads to an under assessment of the effectiveness of the educational enterprise.

A fairer assessment might be done by comparing the process of education with that of other public-serving institutions over the last twenty five years. As I make this superficial comparison, I do not claim it to be inclusive, but I believe it to be characteristic and therefore fair when used solely for comparing institutional effectiveness.

During that same period of time, correctional institutions have achieved

no great record of rehabilitating criminals; housing authorities have not created conditions in which all or most of the population is adequately quartered; the criminal justice system has not produced equitable sentencing and equal access to legal defense for all people; the system of social welfare has not raised the standard of living, generally, for the poor; and appropriate health care is still not available to the masses, this in spite of the enormous gains made in the field of medicine.

Why then does education, the most successful of all public institutions, continue to receive a disproportunate amount of criticism? It is because we are victims of our own success. In having served all children, in having a greater percentage of the population functionally literate than has ever been true during this nation's history, we have raised the level of expectations of the public to a point at which it expects school to make every child successful.

Parents tend to believe that twelve years of public education should guarantee their child's success, when the fact is school can only prepare one for success. The rest is in the hand of the individual. Other public institutions must contribute their reasonable share to the nurturing of the individual toward success.

The future holds no forseeable relief from the hightened expectations which the nation has of its schools. You and I must commit ourselves to the never endingchallenge of educating every child to the fullest extend of his or her potential. The end result will be a better America for us all.